CLAY GEERDES' COMIX WAVE 119
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COMIX PLUGOLA

The logo for this issue was drawn by Robert Pasternak.

This Month's Special is a little package of Comix Wave Minicomix. If you're new and wonder what these newave comix were all about, send me $3.50 and I'll mail you a dozen. Over 18 only. C.G.

WONDER CON 6

Wonder Con is coming up April 24-26 at the Oakland Convention Center. The Con hotel is the Park Oakland [510-893-1234] and Con info is available from **Bryan Unlenbrock** who is coordinating guests and programming. An SASE will get you a progress report. 5440 Morrow Dr., San Pablo, CA 94806. I'll be attending the con on the weekend. C.G.

TWISTED IMAGE 37 continues the wit and madness of Ace Backwards. Like me, Ace talks about whatever comes into his head and draws comic strips which often have to do with the decline and fall of the American Empire. I always get a few laughs out of Ace's newsletter, so check out a copy. Send him a buck. 1630 University Avenue, Apt. 26, Berkeley, CA 94703.

Dave Sim was in Berkeley signing his work at Comic Relief on January 18. Copies of **CEREBUS 153** were on sale along with four reprint collections of Sim's work.

Trade your zine for the latest **MAGPIE**. From David Doyle, 5294 Tobin St., #12, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3H 1S2.

I see tv commercialism is moving into a new phase. Advertising has infiltrated just about everything to the extent that it has become unpleasant to watch. Who wants to be bombarded with constant product hype? I turned on the ice skating finals Saturday afternoon. They were sponsored by a diet drink and an artificial sweetener, products aimed at the ignorant who think that is the way weight is lost. Giant ads for these products were pasted on one side of the arena so that each time the skater went around the viewer got another glimpse of both ads. This is a tachistoscopic technique and the result is an hour-long commercial. To further rub it in, a short commercial for the soft drink was played several times during the program. This ad within the larger ad featured ice skaters happily swilling down the useless product. Every time I saw the product swing by I got more and more disgusted and I finally gave it up and turned the show off. Here is an interesting situation, huh? If I were to buy the video of this ice skating show in order not to see any commercials I would still be subjected to the ads.

I am opposed to having products associated with sports and am particularly upset by the current trend to associate unhealthy and dangerous products with what ought to be healthy activities. Beer is a dangerous drug that kills more teenagers every year than heroin ever did, yet it has become impossible to watch a football game without being subjected to a lot of fraudulent advertising aimed directly at teenagers. The advertiser assumes, probably correctly, that the adults are already hooked so there is no reason to aim advertising at them. the core of these commercials is the idea that you are a good sport if you drink and that drinking will make you muscular and beautiful, *real* men and women. The truth is drinking will simply make you act like a stupid clod, one whose judgment other people will consider questionable. Using this or that product isn't going to prove your manliness or womanliness, it's just going to type you as a conformist afraid to assert your individuality.

Paul Krassner's **THE REALIST** is still alive. $2 from him, Box 1230, Venice, CA 90274. The latest is #119 on the cover of which Murphy Brown has her baby.

EL VIBORA 143 is $9 pp from J. M. Berengueuer, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain. **KISS #2**, the new Spanish sex comic is in the same format and for the same price. Both magazines contain R. Crumb stores in Spanish.

"I was taken to the movies once but I screamed in such terror at the cartoon that showed the aeroplanes with teeth like sharks tearing at each other in the sky that mother was forced to take me outside. Then I wept so unconsolably that I was never taken to a cinema again."
Germaine Greer
Daddy We Hardly Knew You, 1989.

Whatever happened to **The Nebbishes**? Why do we never see any reprints? Who is suppressing these characters and why? A conspiracy? The Nebbishes preceded Dan O'Neill's talking potatoes, the **Odd Bodkins**--could it be that the Bodkins offed the Nebbishes in a secret plot and destroyed all memory of their existence? Does anyone out there collect Nebbish strips?

THE RETURN OF THE SHMOO

The Shmoo has returned. I was a teenager when Al Capp did the series of Shmoo strips and I remember all of the stories about these little creatures who could become anything anyone needed anytime they needed it. There were Shmoo bars at Harold's where we hung out and played the Old Faithful pinball machine in 1948. In a department store in Lincoln, Nebraska, I found a giant Shmoo balloon fixed to a pair of cardboard feet. My brother and I had a good time punching this Shmoo around our room. There were a few Shmoo comic books, but Capp sold the rights to someone; the art wasn't his.

If you are curious about the life of Alfred Gerald Caplin who turned himself into Al Capp when he became a pro cartoonist, you might look at the recent collection of his essays, **My Well Balanced Life on a Wooden Leg**, introduced by John Updike for John Daniel & Company, Santa Barbara, 1991. Capp tells the story of the fatal haircut in the title essay. For him everything changed on August 21, 1919, when he was given fifty cents to get a haircut and decided to hitch a ride on the back of an ice wagon and save some of the money to spend for something else. When Capp hopped off the back of the wagon in front of the barber shop he fell in the path of a moving trolley car and his left leg was severed at the thigh. There was no micro-surgery at that time and Capp was doomed to lived out his life with a wooden leg. This became a focal point for him and while the essays have a bit to do with his development as a cartoonist, they focus mostly on his misadventures as a one-legged boy limping through puberty.

Capp was nine when he lost his leg. He lived seventy years, dying in 1979. His strip L'il Abner began in 1934, the year I was born, so I grew up with Capp's humor. The musical which came out in the late fifties was great [out on tape now] and Capp's influence may be detected in many areas from the Ma and Pa Kettle movies to the Beverly Hillbillies tv series. There was a theme park in Kentucky called Dogpatch, USA, but I don't know if it is still open. All of the Li'l Abner reprint books are still available in local comic book stores or from Kitchen Sink. The Shmoo book is scheduled for March of 1992.

Comedy is the public version of a private darkness. The funnier it is the more one must speculate on how much terror lies hidden.
--Paul Theroux
My Secret History

Dear Clay--

I found some old underground comix in a box in our garage and someone told me they were worth a lot of money these days. Is there some way I can find out what these comix are worth?

-Hank Gooch

Hank--

Jay Kennedy did a price guide for underground and newave comix back in 1983, but this book is long out of print and the prices would not be relevant to the current market. Have you checked at your local comic book store to see if they have any undergrounds on sale? Quite frankly, there are only a few serious underground comix collectors and most of them have all the common titles. It is possible you have some first editions in that box if it dates back to the late sixties or early seventies and if you have there may be a little gold there, but not much. Name me some of the titles and I'll give you an estimate, but I've had very little mail re undergrounds lately. Comic collecting has always depended a lot on continuity and the undergrounds, with a couple of exceptions, were seldom continuous. Most were one shots, here one day and gone forever the next. **Zap** and **The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers** came out about every two or three years, too far apart to stimulate many collectors. Since most of the more popular undergrounds have been reprinted again and again for the past twenty years, only the first editions have more than token monetary value. I think if there was a lot of serious underground collecting going on, one would see evidence of it at the conventions and that is not the case. Many dealers don't even bother to bring their underground boxes these days and there is a message there.

Dear Uncle Clay--

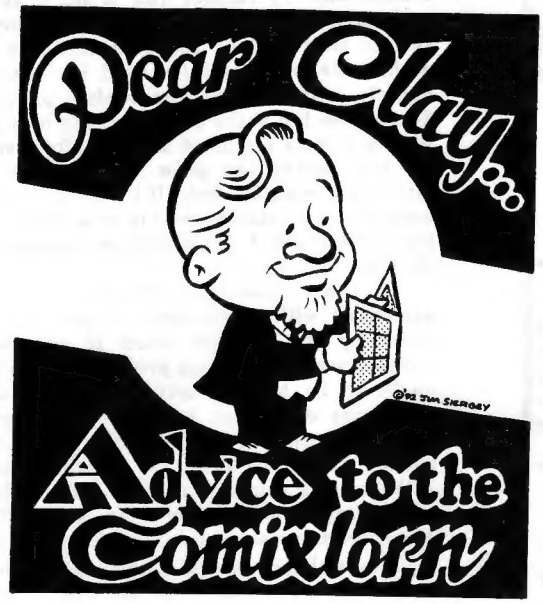
I read that underground comix were suppressed in the mid-seventies because they were filled with sex and violence. Is there any truth to that?

-Harlan Neuwelt

Dear Harlan--

I love this sex and violence crapola, don't you? There are several thousand underground comix and if you page through them you will find that only a few dwell on sex and violence and in most of these the sex and violence is dealt with in a humorous and satirical manner. Sales of underground and alternative comix began to slide in the mid-seventies due to inflation and those in the business by that time were forced to shift their focus to other areas or quit the game. I'm not saying there was no suppression of comix because I know this happened in both England and America, but I think economics played a bigger role than politics. How this happened is interesting. Many underground comix publishers were distributing the bulk of their comix through head shops, specialty stores that dealt in drug paraphenalia. These stores were forced to close during the period, hence underground comix sales dropped off. What happened to the comix was a side effect of what happened to the head shops. The majority of underground comix have had very little trouble with either local or national suppression since people don't pay that much attention to comic books. The most busted comic is still **ZAP 4**.

-Clay



Dear Clay,

I can't seem to get all these things straight and I need help. What is the difference between Underground and Newave Comix? What is a minicomic? What does Ground-level mean [I saw this on an old copy of Star*Reach.]?

-Sam Siggers

Dear Sam,

Back in the early sixties, there was a comics establishment, mostly based in the Eastern part of the United States. This consisted of several major companies, namely, Marvel, National [DC, for Detective Comics, their first big seller], Charlton, Archie, and EC, for Entertaining Comics, by then doing Mad Magazine, which existed in comic book format from 1952-4. On MAD #16, Harvey Kurtzman ran a little mock news item that said "Comics Go Underground," which was a reference to the effect of Fredric Wertham's PTA attacks on comic books and juvenile crime. Kurtzman was implying that comic books would soon be sold by shady characters in overcoats on subway platforms or perhaps out of the suitcases of travelling salesmen a la the Tiajuana Bibles. Robert Crumb probably saw this little item and used the idea when he drew ZAP COMIX in 1967; in any case, Crumb refered to himself as an underground cartoonist, hence the term Underground comix.

As a little time passed, many other artists began to draw their own books and to publish and distribute them from wherever they happened to be. This broke the Eastern monopoly on comic books for a time and soon any comic book published outside the Eastern Establishment was called an underground or alternative comic book. The term alternative came into use when some new publishers realized that the term underground was being associated mainly with erotic or pornographic comics, but it meant that the publisher was putting out what he considered an alternative to Eastern superhero comics as well as an alternative to the sexually-oriented undergrounds. Alternatives are often referred to as black and whites by comic store employees.

Newave comix came along in the late seventies and was a term borrowed from the rock music of the time. The idea of a new wave of art or literature or poetry has been around for many years. I first heard it used in relation to poetry in North Beach during the Beatnik period in the late fifties. It was used in relation to certain French films during the same time, mainly those of François Truffault. When I began publishing minicomix in 1978, I did not use the term newave on these little books. I think it was George Erling who used it, but he may have gotten it somewhere else. Minicomix came into usage in reference to four, eight, and sixteen pagers, self-published, usually by xerox, and sold for anywhere from a dime to a couple of dollars. I charged 50¢ because I decided there weren't worth the bother for any less. Many cartoonists were involved in these little quickies and all have their own point of view about them. Many considered what they were doing a continuation of the freedom of art and thought that arose during the initial period of underground activity circa 1969.

Ground-level was a term Michael Friedrich made up for his Star*Reach comics. He wanted to distinguish what he was doing from undergrounds and East Coast books and he decided that his books were at a midpoint or ground-level between the extremes represented by the other companies. Most of the time, he used the idea of alternative comics. This was the term that held on in the eighties to denote black and white comics with color covers run by non-East Coast companies. Companies like Eternity, Dark Horse, and Brave New Words fall into this category.

Most of the terms refer to the format of the comic books rather than the content, but underground and erotic comix continue to have a sexual connotation for most fans. In the sixties, we referred to underground comix as hip and any other comics as straight.

No comix exist in a vacuum and any historian can show a pattern of development from the days of Winsor McCay and Bud Fisher to Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton. One of the strongest immediate influences on Underground and the subsequent Newave comix was Mad Magazine with EC horror and Quality Comics a close second.

--Clay